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The U.S. Denies Putting Pressure On Hondurans

Says Latins Raised Alert on the Sandinista Raid

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WASHINGTON, April 3 — The Reagan Administration today denied assertions by a senior Honduran official that the United States had deliberately exaggerated the seriousness of Nicaragua's recent border raid, and had pressed Honduras to ask for \$20 million in emergency aid.

Both the White House and the State Department said the statements by the unidentified Honduran "come as a surprise to us, especially in view of their deviation from the facts and from the public and private position of the Honduran Government."

The Ambassador in Honduras, John Ferch, was instructed to seek "a clarification" from President Jose Azcona about the allegations. A State Department official said later that Mr. Azcona had told Mr. Ferch that the statements made by the senior official had not been cleared by him.

Senate Acted After Publicity

Last week, after the Administration charged Nicaragua with "invading" Honduras on March 22, the Senate approved \$100 million in aid for the Nicaraguan rebels. Some critics have said that the publicity given the raid, which was aimed at the rebel bases, had been engineered by the Administration to sway wavering senators.

A State Department official said that he did not know which Honduran official had spoken of United States pressure, but that the comment seemed to reflect the views of Foreign Minister Carlos López Contreras, who had been more concerned about the matter than President Azcona.

When Mr. López was interviewed on the CBS Evening News on March 26, he said that the Nicaraguan incursion "does does not represent a major

threat to the security of Honduras."

The unidentified Honduran official quoted in the same vein in an interview with The New York Times and other newspapers asked that his name not be made public because of the sensitivity of the subject.

He said the Honduran Foreign Ministry was concerned that Nicaragua not overreact to the situation, and that Honduras not upset other Latin American countries who were critical of the American military involvement in the region.

The Administration reacted quickly and sharply because the remarks attributed to the Honduran echoed charges by critics of the Administration's efforts to obtain the \$100 million in aid for the Nicaraguan rebels.

The House of Representatives on March 20 had defeated the request. There is to be another vote in the House on April 15, and the issue of the Nicaraguan incursion into Honduras is certain to come up in the debate.

U.S. Issues a Statement

The unidentified Honduran official said that Honduras never felt its security was endangered by the Nicaraguans and that the United States had pressed Honduras to turn the incursion into a major crisis.

"The United States' interest was that this situation have the connotation of an international incident," he said. "We had no interest in this."

He also said Honduras had asked for aid only when the American Embassy suggested that the United States would welcome such a request.

The United States rebuttal was issued today by Larry Speakes, the White House spokesman in California, where President Reagan is on holiday, and by Bernard Kalb, the State Department spokesman. They said:

"The allegations of U.S. pressure reportedly made by an unidentified Honduran official are not true. These statements came as a surprise to us, especially in view of their deviation from the facts and from the public and private position of the Honduran Government. We have asked the Government of Honduras for a clarification.

Honduras Followed the U.S.

"The United States neither exaggerated the extent of the Nicaraguan incursion nor pressured the Government of Honduras to request U.S. emergency military assistance. We note that the Government of Honduras initiated at the highest levels the first discussions of the serious threat of a pending Nicaraguan attack on Honduras, and of a possible Honduran need for emergency U.S. assistance."

The first word of the Nicaraguan incursion was made public on March 24 by an Administration official who said that 1,500 Nicaraguan troops had crossed 12 miles into Honduras in what he said was the deepest penetration ever by Nicaraguan forces.

Honduras went public with the allegations only after the United States had done so. This led critics to suspect that the Administration had pressed Honduras into making the charges to bolster the case with Congress.

President Reagan, in response to a Honduran request, approved \$20 million in emergency aid, in the form of military equipment and the provision of helicopters ferrying Honduran troops to the border area. This emergency aid to Honduras came out of existing funds and did not require Congressional approval.

An official of the State Department said today that it had the first authoritative word of the Nicaraguan action on March 22, when President Azcona informed the American Embassy. The State Department official said that on March 24, President Azcona telephoned William G. Walker, Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, at about 11:30 A.M. to request the military aid.

60 Missions, Not 60 Helicopters

"Walker asked him: 'Is this a formal request?' and Azcona said, 'Yes,'" the State Department official said. "Walker said, 'Will you put it in writing and really make it official?'"

The Honduran President replied that he would and that his Army Chief of Staff would arrange details.

"Thereafter, the Chief of Staff called Walker also, and asked for things like 60 helicopters," the State Department official said. When Mr. Walker said the United States could not provide 60 helicopters so quickly, it turned out that the Honduran meant 60 sorties, or missions, not 60 helicopters.

After the phone calls, the United States' deputy chief of mission in Honduras, Shepard C. Lowman, met with President Azcona and Foreign Minister López to remind them that President Reagan needed a publicized, written request to be able to approve the aid and prove to Congress that it was a genuine request, the State Department official said.